

WASHINGTON 21

RAISE THE TOBACCO AGE

Dear Washington State Legislators:

Tobacco use remains a leading cause of preventable death in Washington, contributing to 8,300 deaths annually and costing the state more than \$5 billion a year in healthcare costs and lost productivity.¹ In an effort to combat tobacco use and prevent youth nicotine addiction, our organizations are collectively in support of raising the minimum age of sale for tobacco products, including electronic products, to 21 years old in Washington.

Both opponents of smoking and purveyors of cigarettes have long recognized the significance of adolescence and early adulthood as the period during which smoking behaviors are typically developed. Research shows that nearly 90% of smokers begin smoking before the age of 18, and nearly 100% of smokers begin smoking by age 26.² Further, adolescents are still going through critical periods of brain development, including the parts responsible for decision-making, impulse control, sensation seeking, and susceptibility to peer pressure.³ The U.S. Surgeon General reports that adolescents can become dependent on nicotine very rapidly, and at lower levels of consumption than adults.

Raising the age of sale for tobacco products to 21 will make it harder for 15 to 17 year olds to access tobacco products, helping to protect them from addiction to a deadly product. According to the Institute of Medicine, raising the tobacco sale age will alter the peer group of high school students, who often access tobacco products through older individuals in their social networks.⁴ With the minimum legal sale age set at 21 instead of 18, legal purchasers would be less likely to be in the same social networks as high school students and therefore less accessible to sell or give cigarettes to them.

Action today will save lives. There are 104,000 Washington kids alive today who will ultimately die prematurely from smoking.⁵ Raising the national minimum age of sale for tobacco products to 21, over the long term, is projected to reduce adult smoking prevalence by 12% and reduce smoking-related deaths by nearly 10%.⁶

To keep tobacco out of the hands of kids and prevent nicotine addiction, we urge your support for raising the age of sale for tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes, to 21 years. Over 140 municipalities nationwide have already taken action to do so, as well as the states of Hawaii and California. Washington should be next.

Sincerely,

¹ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, "The Toll of Tobacco in Washington," http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/washington

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking – 50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prevention Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health, 2012.

⁴ Institute of Medicine, Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015, <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>

⁵ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, "The Toll of Tobacco in Washington," http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/washington

⁶ Institute of Medicine, Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015, <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>

Community and Health Organizations Support *Tobacco 21 for Washington*



American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American College of Cardiology, Washington Chapter
American Heart Association | American Stroke Association
American Lung Association
Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation
Southeast Seattle P.E.A.C.E. Coalition
Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials
Washington State Board of Health
Washington State Hospital Association
Washington State Medical Association